

What are slamers (not) telling us about? Multimodality of spoken-word poetry

People perceive the external world through their senses. They are the ones that allow us to perceive and interpret impulses coming from the world. The messages that appear in our environment are not only verbal. We can look, hear, feel, move and touch and in this way communicate with our environment. Images, sounds, and objects surround us from everywhere and convey different messages to us. They not only enrich the possibilities of communication but, using other channels, convey what cannot be expressed with words. All extra-linguistic elements that influence the quality of communication by becoming a part of it can be called multimodality.

Communication using multimodal properties is a characteristic feature of speeches appearing at slam poetry tournaments. Poetry slams have been held in Poland continuously since 2003, and in the last five years one can notice an increase in their popularity. This has to do with slam tournaments taking place regularly throughout Poland, as well as events of national rank: National Poetry Slam Championships (Poznań) and the Spoke'n'Word Festival (Warsaw).

Slam poetry is an event during which any interested person can read their statement/poem. They have three minutes to present it and cannot use props. The slammer can enrich his/her performance by using audio and visual elements (e.g. gestures, facial expressions, tonic expressions, physical characteristics of his/her voice). Using these elements ensures more effective communication with the audience, who also act as a jury - they vote for their favorite speeches and choose the master of the evening.

After many years of observing the slam community, I noticed that slammers like to use established communication patterns, taking advantage of multimodal aspects of communication. This prompted me to conduct research whose main goal is to reconstruct a comprehensive model of multimodal slammer speech.

The project will analyze slamers' utterances obtained through field research conducted at Polish and foreign slam tournaments, archival searches of available recordings, and utterances submitted by slamers through the Virtual Archive of Slam Poetry (WASP) platform. The results will then be compiled and an arrangement of recurring and most frequently used communication patterns will be created. The project will examine how the use of multimodal elements affects the relationship with the audience. Research conducted beyond borders will allow us to look at multimodal communication in a broader perspective and observe whether slammers have developed universal means of expression or whether they are of local character.

The reason for the interest in such a research topic was its innovative and experimental character, as well as the potential possibilities of social engagement of the research and inclusion in the international stream of reflections related to oral creativity. The public engagement of the present project will consist not only in the possibility of observing a new phenomenon of contemporary art, but also in communication with the creators through the Virtual Archive of Slam Poetry.

The WASP will be a continuously updated website that will allow slammers to contribute to the dissemination of slam knowledge by submitting their recorded material. Once such material is submitted, it will be compiled and annotated scientifically, taking into account, among other things, the topic, compositional and stylistic elements, and the level of accessibility of the expression. Such a scheme of developing material will be attractive to people interested in slamer culture and researchers who will be able to use the WASP in their research, e.g. in the field of audiovisuality, cognitive linguistics, rhetoric, or ethnology.

It can be assumed that the projected reconstruction of the overall model of slamers' speech will show that slamers' actions have repeatable, well-established structures that enable effective communication with the audience. The project will contribute to the popularization of knowledge about slam, and its lasting result will be the WASP platform, which potentially has a chance to set further directions for research on the phenomenon of spoken word poetry and its multimodal aspects.